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What is a Healthy Body? Asking for a Friend. A Mini Ethnography About Undergraduate Women at Seattle University and Their Relationships with Food and Exercise.

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Abstract

Transitional periods have been identified as potential triggers for eating disorders in college students (Karges 2016). Risk factors for eating disorders can be biological, psychological, and sociocultural (National Eating Disorder Association 2018). The sociocultural risk of eating disorders includes weight stigma which, according to feminist philosopher Susan Bordo, can greatly impact the self-image of North American women. Bordo refers to the “ideal” female body as the “slender body,” one that is reflected and glorified in contemporary media (1993). Although undergraduate women are a potentially fragile population, as they are away from their childhood eating and exercise routines and in an environment that provides an onslaught of perfected images, Seattle University informants described the university as being a healthier climate for body positivity than other universities. However, each of the informants also described using the weightlifting area of the campus fitness center as an uncomfortable experience. Informants ascribed their overall positive perception of the university to the absence of Greek life, widespread acceptance of cultural attitudes, and support from likeminded friends. Informants described other sociocultural factors that shaped their habits and body-image, including social media and at-home education about nutrition and exercise. By applying Bordo’s framework about gender and body image and examining the psychosocial impacts of objectification theory, this project seeks to unpack the various sociocultural factors that shape the way that three undergraduate women at Seattle University have come to form their body image, eating habits, and exercise routines as college students.

Introduction

As I turned around, my face grew hot. It wasn't just the 90-degree temperature in the room making me uneasy; it was the woman behind me who had, unintentionally, caused an emotional disruption to my normal yoga environment. The woman was wearing heavier makeup than most of the regulars, and her highlighted hair was carefully swept back. She was wearing a tight-fitting Victoria's Secret tank-top, with "University of Texas-Austin" splayed across the chest, and had left her beaded bracelets and Apple Watch on her wrists for the sweaty class. Pushing her glossy pastel-painted fingernails and toenails back into her first downward facing dog, she swiftly mirrored the postures instructed by the young and attractive male yoga teacher.

At first, I didn't understand my discomfort. Upon reflection, I realized that it was the first time I had seen someone display such a heavy dose of feminine manicuring in that environment. I immediately perceived her ensemble as an effort to impress the male instructor. I surveyed some of the other femme people in the class. As I watched them stand on their bright mats in leggings and tank tops I noticed that, when some of them felt his gaze upon them, they would push themselves harder in their poses. Was this a misinterpretation? Were they really perfecting their poses to impress him? Is that a heteronormative assumption? Is it regressive of me to assume that they would be presenting nicely just for a man? Do these femme people push themselves the same way under the gaze of any instructor regardless of their gender?

The phenomenon I was sensing was later confirmed by one of the women working at the front desk. She told me that she'd seen other noticeable displays of feminine manicuring for his class and described a woman adorned with a fresh face of makeup, and a very expensive yoga set, who had walked in to take his class the week prior. The employee added that many women who work at the yoga studio, and women who attend his classes, often gush about how they have a crush on him and come to his class just to stare at or impress him.

With my yoga classmates perceivably bending under the male gaze, I felt a flash of insecurity. As I looked at my stomach rolls in the mirror, I bent my sweaty body forward. I looked back at the well-manicured woman again. In the sleek, modern yoga studio I didn't perceive her as threatening or intimidating, per se. She just looked like a yoga-wear advertisement. Usually, when I look at print or digital media representations of models, I can identify the artifice of photoshop, posing, and lighting. But here, in my class, was a physical manifestation of those advertisements. It was unavoidable. The in-person advertisement seemed to scream in my head, "this is how models look when they do yoga. This is the gold standard. You wish you looked like this." During my short time living in Seattle this intense, familiar feeling had not yet reared its head. It felt intrusive and invasive; I had not invited this

insecurity. This was a sensation that I strongly associated with home.

I grew up in Phoenix, Arizona where “bikini season” lasted for more than half of the year. The warm-weather climate ensured that diet advertisers depicted pictures of the perfect “summer body” practically all year round. At the grocery store, checkout lines are covered with magazines urging you to “get your bikini body.” The desired aspects of this ideal are further demonstrated by the model’s whitened smile, bronzed skin, size DD breasts, hourglass waist, and muscular glutes. In Phoenix, the cultural construction and associated meanings of my “social skin,” my outward public presentation and sartorial choices that have deep social implications, are firmly rooted in a particular hegemonic femininity. I feel I am expected to mold my body to fit an ideal shape, to dress in styles that accentuate that shape, and to wear clothing brands that convey social conformity and class status. The implicit social pressures in Phoenix urge me, and women I know, to display femme bodies that are hairless, manicured, and coiffed.

When I first moved to Seattle University I immediately noticed a social contrast with Arizona, particularly regarding gender expression and body attitudes. I was delighted by the dramatic change in sartorial preferences that came with my relocation. Women walked about in noticeably androgynous looks; the cold weather climate meant that my peers were more concerned about my cool Doc Martens and fur-lined trucker jacket than how flat my stomach looked in my new swimsuit. This culture shock made me curious: are my peers at Seattle University comfortable in their bodies and gender expressions? What sociocultural factors at Seattle University are reducing or producing risk of disordered eating habits, fitness habits, or negative body images? What childhood factors do people attribute to their eating habits, fitness habits, and body images?

Methods and Fieldsites

This project was conducted over a ten-week period. I utilized a variety of research methods to gather data, including participant observation, formal interviews, informal interviews, life history interviews, visual media analysis, and document analysis. I analyzed viral online diet advertisements from celebrity figures like Kim Kardashian and Instagram photos from ultra-thin model, Alexis Ren. My participant observation took place primarily at the commercial hot yoga studio close to campus, and at the on-campus fitness center. Both of these locations are frequented by Seattle University students and alumni, but have significantly different clientele, presumably due to costs and services. The fitness center offers a variety of classes and equipment and is free for Seattle University students, while the yoga

studio costs nearly \$100 per month and only offers yoga and cycling classes.

My key informants were three Seattle University students, Lydia, Ava, and Emma. Lydia and Ava were residents of a dorm hall when I was its resident assistant. Emma and I are good friends who had met the previous year. I conducted interviews in Emma's apartment and in the residence hall where Ava, Lydia, and I resided. Ava, Lydia, and Emma are white women who grew up in the Pacific Northwest. Lydia and Ava are from Bellingham, Washington and Bend, Oregon, respectively. Emma is from Juneau, Alaska. All three women attended yoga classes at the studio I reference in this research. My findings are in no way meant to be representative of the population of undergraduate women at Seattle University or at the yoga studio.

I would like to recognize the importance of my own subjectivity and the nature of the questions I asked my informants. First, it's important to recognize that my position as a resident assistant at Seattle University alters the power dynamic in relation to Ava and Lydia who lived in the residence hall on my floor. Moreover, because we knew each other prior to this research project, the participants were aware of my current investment in body-positivity activism and my history of struggle with my own body image. It is important to point out that because my informants were already aware of my predisposition toward a body-positive and anti-diet lifestyle, it is possible that their answers were molded by that knowledge. However, I chose to interview women with whom I had a previous rapport because I hoped they would be comfortable talking to me about potentially sensitive and personal topics. I also surmised, based on my knowledge that each of these individuals talk about their bodies in casual conversation, that they would not be surprised or confused by any of our interviews.

Gender and the Body

Lydia and I sat on my couch as we prepared for the formal interview. She sat a bit stiffly at first, seemingly nervous and unsure of the questions I would ask. Lydia is tall and slender. She has medium length brown hair and speaks softly. From my previous interactions with her, I noticed she's a bit reserved in describing feelings, sensations, and experiences. She often keeps responses brief and concise. As the interview progressed, her posture loosened, and she spoke at greater length. When I asked for her thoughts on how the media portrays the female body, she said: "especially for females, with Instagram or whatever social media, it's kind of like you see the fitness models and all of these bodies. It seems like it's pushed upon girls, especially, to eat right or eat under a certain amount of calories a day" (Lydia, personal communication, May, 2018). Lydia's comment, on the gendered and fixed amount of caloric

energy needed by folks who identify as women, is a pervasive theme in diet advertising and health campaigns.

While people of all gender identities experience eating disorders, or disordered eating and fitness patterns, systematic pressure placed on women to conform to a specific mold of femininity has been widely studied by many scholars. Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo cites slenderness as a contemporary ideal of feminine attractiveness and argues that women seek to control and manipulate their bodies as a means of social capital and power (1993). Bordo refers to the contemporary ideal as the “slender body,” which is a body free from excess “flab” or fat. According to Bordo, both body-building obsessions and anorexic behaviors stem from the same rejection of flab. Each is just a different manifestation of the same desire for a firm, controlled body. Pressures to conform to the slender body are found in various types of contemporary media and advertisements. Each of my informants mentioned the impacts of media on women’s bodies and confidence. Emma and Ava echoed similar sentiments about the ways that social media sets unhealthy standards for women and young girls, with Ava expressing that, “I have to remind myself, when I see a tabloid, that it’s photoshopped and not real” (Ava, personal communication, May, 2018).

Bordo theorized that the slender body is a result of varying patriarchal structures and can function to give women power in a variety of ways. A firm body, according to Bordo, is often perceived as a social indication that a woman leads an organized and composed lifestyle, whereas people often correlate fat with laziness. With the rise of women in male-dominated fields, Bordo says that women feel pressure to manipulate their figures to be more palatable to men. Bordo theorizes that some women feel pressure to neutralize and defeminize their bodies, in order to reduce visual cues that might threaten masculine power. As a result, women aim to decrease the size of their “feminine” bellies, breasts, or other features (1993). By exploring the way that gender expression is present in visual cues, such as body fat and muscle distribution, the nuanced motivations of women’s physical alterations become visible.

Caution on the First Floor of the Fitness Center

Inside the William F. Eisiminger Fitness Center, weightlifting equipment occupies the entire first floor. On a typical weekday, at peak gym times, you will find over a dozen male-presenting folks standing in front of the large mirror, watching their forms as they pump weights. They let out deep breaths that often sound like grunting. For people wanting to use the first floor of the gym, maneuvering around these men is no easy task. The safest walkway is between their bodies and the mirror, which means that they will see you as you shuffle

past. Often all of the weightlifting machines and benches are occupied, so, if you want to use one you must linger in the area until your desired equipment is free. Men occupy most free weights at any given moment. Sometimes, they come to the gym in pairs. More often, it seems, they come solo, disinterested in the actions of other men, and focused only on their own forms in the mirror. I interpret the general energy in this space as competitive, though it's arguably a competition with oneself.

Lydia, Ava, and Emma all ascribed occasional feelings of discomfort, shame, or anxiety to their experiences of exercising, or thinking about exercising, on the first floor of the fitness center. The women mainly ascribed these feelings to being intimidated by men. Fears of being judged or objectified were among their concerns. Lydia admitted to feeling self-conscious about her ability to lift weights in that particular space. She explained that she was accustomed to all-women training environments: "I know how to weightlift from being in sports in high school, but I'm still uncomfortable being on the first floor of the gym. I stick to the second floor" (Lydia, personal communication, May, 2018). In 1997, psychology professors Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts developed what they refer to as "objectification theory." Often cited by other psychology scholars, objectification theory refers to the ways that the heterosexual male gaze shapes the sociocultural experience of being in a female body. Objectification can result in habitual body self-monitoring, including checking, pinching, and other kinds of active self-scrutiny. This monitoring can prompt feelings of shame and anxiety, and can potentially decrease bodily awareness cues of hunger, fatigue, or depressive symptoms. According to Fredrickson and Roberts, "accumulations of such experiences may help account for an array of mental health risks that disproportionately affect women: unipolar depression, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders" (1997, 173).

Objectification theory may provide an added layer of theoretical understanding to the stressful phenomenon described by my informants. Discomfort in a male-dominated weightlifting space is a poignantly gendered issue that these women register as an attack on the inherent worth and abilities of their bodies. Indeed, it is for this reason that these women have turned to the alternative fitness space of the yoga studio. I do wonder, however: if this gym were the only fitness space these women had access to, would their attitudes about fitness change? Would they become discouraged from using the gym? Would they eventually develop negative associations with exercise and their bodies? I'm told anecdotally that many femme people resort to using only the upstairs portion of the gym. As for myself, I have stopped going to the gym altogether. Now, I attend the same yoga studio as my participants.

Each of my three research participants attend the same local yoga studio as their primary source of exercise. I asked Emma if her yoga classes were more comfortable to her because it's predominately women who attend them. She said that, no, she doesn't mind having men in her yoga classes. Yet she described the exercise environment at the yoga studio

as being different from the gym. The way that exercise is conducted in the gym space means that men have not only a monopoly on equipment but also the perceived ability to lift heavier weights. By contrast, in the yoga studio poses, space, and equipment are more accessible and egalitarian. Lydia, Emma, and Ava feel more empowered by the space that the yoga studio provides.

No Sorority Stress? No Problem

Ava turned toward me on the couch, smiling and referencing the lunch in her hands: “have you had food from this food truck before? It’s amazing.” As she munched away, I thought about the irony of how we’d be talking diet culture as she ate. Ava has bobbed blonde hair and a loud speaking voice. She’s passionate about learning French and is generally very sociable. When I asked her about the climate around food and nutrition at Seattle University, she attributed Seattle U’s positive food culture to the lack of gendered “hierarchy” that she said is enforced by sororities and fraternities:

We don’t have Greek life here. My sister was in a sorority for only one quarter because they tried to tell her what she should look like ... they wanted her to color her hair differently, they wanted her to dress differently ... Seattle U is lucky that we don’t have some weird hierarchy on sororities and fraternities because there’s such a stigma that comes with that ... She dropped it because she’s like you’re making me feel worse about myself and there’s nothing wrong with me ... That’s why I chose this school ... We’re supposed to pull each other up, we’re in a man’s world, so to have each other pushing each other down about bodies and stuff is just the weirdest concept. (Ava, personal communication, May, 2018)

The hierarchical femininity that Ava describes echoes the way Bordo refers to the body as a vehicle that women use to achieve power and superiority, either in competition with other women or for the pleasure of men. When I talked with Lydia, she shared a similar story about a friend who is attending the University of Arizona and is in a sorority. Lydia said that, when her friend was visiting her at Seattle University, she was surprised that Lydia and her friends were going to a party in what she considered to be comparatively casual and less-revealing clothes. Lydia explained that at Seattle University you can wear something to a party

that you'd wear to class, which her friend said isn't standard at the University of Arizona, especially in Greek life (Lydia, personal communication, May, 2018) My informants perceived Greek life as detrimental to the mental health and self-worth of their peers; the pressure to wear certain clothes and appear a certain way on social media is heightened for those participating in Greek life.

Social Media: Fitness Models, Food Videos, and a Growing Body Positivity Community

According to an article published in March 2017 by the Huffington Post, Americans spent over \$60 billion yearly on diet and weight loss products (Parrish, 2017). According to diet and beauty advertisements, women's bodies ought to be the right kind of thin and just the right degree of curvy, legs ought to be free of cellulite and stretch marks, and "muffin tops" ought to be eliminated. There are lotions, creams, pills, teas, cleanses, and other products that promise desirable results. Each of my informants addressed ways that the diet industry uses the media to perpetuate narratives on health and fitness that can be damaging to women's bodies. Lydia said, "I've found myself looking at these fitness Instagrams and thinking, 'Maybe I should try doing these exercises because these women have really nice bodies' and stuff like that" (Lydia, personal communication, May, 2018).

When diet businesses and fitness Instagrammers make women feel like they need to adhere to a certain physique, they can be coopted into participating in food and exercise behaviors that can be dangerous to their physical and mental health (Selig, 2010). "It's really hard in this day and age," Ava said. "Women are expected to be 5' 8" and thin ... it's so wrong. Women aren't going around like they have no flaws and looking like a tiny little stick ... It is hard being a woman" (Ava, personal communication, May, 2018).

Michel Foucault's concept of "biopower" is useful for theorizing the relationship between media discourses about the body and my informant's discussions about the pressures they feel to shape their bodies. Through mass media messaging, women can deduce that they are inherently more valuable to society and potential partners, and will feel better about themselves when they adhere to hegemonic femininity. According to Michel Foucault, biopower is "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (1976, 140). Drawing on this concept of biopower, Cressida Heyes in her book *Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers* emphasizes that the diet industry has become wise to the changing access to knowledge about dieting and has linguistically shifted as a result. Now "diets" are being marketed as "lifestyle changes"

and “eating plans” to avoid the negative stigma associated with fad diets. The discourse is constantly changing to target new forms of consumption, all of which focus on women’s bodies. When I asked Emma where women should get information on health and nutrition, she said that was a difficult question to answer, adding, “there’s always something new, from somewhere else, that’s the new healthy thing now” (Emma, personal communication, May, 2018).

Foucault also pointed out that “where there is power, there is resistance.” (1976, 95). Beginning with the foundation of the Body Positive Institute In 1996, a countermovement called the ‘body positivity,’ or ‘body-posi,’ movement began to emerge. The movement now celebrates bodies of all sizes, abilities, and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Emma, Ava, and Lydia all mentioned the movement in our conversations about media. “There’s such a big movement now, more companies are starting to display women that aren’t your average model,” Ava said. “One size doesn’t fit all, that’s not a thing. I saw an ad the other day for a swimsuit line that had a model that wasn’t your average thin model. It’s so nice seeing a variety of body types because there’s not just one ... There’s definitely a change which is huge because getting rid of the stigma that there’s a certain way women should look and eat is really good” (Ava, personal communication, May, 2018). Awareness of the body positive movement is affirming for these three women, and using body positive media to educate themselves has been an experience that has benefitted their overall sense of self.

Seattle U is Perceivably Authentic to “Whole Person” Care

Emma, resting her hands on her kitchen counter, bounced her weight from the ball of her foot back to her heels. Emma has mid-length blonde hair and an affinity for naturopathic and holistic medicine. Emma’s Alaskan heritage can be seen in her apartment décor and in her attire, which often consists of XTRATUF boots and Carhartt beanies. Emma spoke fondly of a friend she met during early high school who helped her learn about healthy food habits and cooking. Emma said that her friend, a swimmer, taught her how to make smoothies and care for her body. Emma’s friends at Seattle University are also invested in self-care and are attentive to when their food and exercise habits detract from their wellbeing, or when they cause stress. Seattle University advertises its mission (in advertising materials and on the SU website) as “caring for the whole person.” While Ava described Seattle University as almost suffocating in its positive messaging, she added “Seattle U is really good about body positivity” (Ava, personal communication, May, 2018). Lydia said that she first she heard body positive messages at Seattle University’s new student orientation at the beginning of the year:

“I think from orientation and everything, they have pushed that everybody should love their own body. It has to do with Seattle culture too. Within my own friend group, I’ve found that we’re all having fairly the same thoughts about body image and being happy with yourself” (Lydia, personal communication, May, 2018). Each of my informants said that their rapport with their friends at Seattle University is positive. Ava said that she had never experienced any body or food shaming during her time at Seattle University and said that though she has advanced knowledge, because she was raised by a nutritionist, her friends seem to share similar knowledge and attitudes about food and the body (Ava, personal communication, May, 2018). My research participants also considered Seattle as a city to be an accepting environment. Emma noted that in Seattle she feels more comfortable wearing whatever she wants (Emma, personal communication, May, 2018). Lydia echoed Emma’s sentiment when she recounted the conversation she had with her friend who was visiting from out of state (Emma, personal communication, May, 2018). Because Seattle University includes care for the person as a core value of the university mission, these women feel that they have systemic support for self-affirmation and healthy choices for practical eating and exercise. They do not receive message about changing their body shapes, but rather about taking care of the vessel that allows them to exist. This systemic support has contributed to these women’s overall feelings of satisfaction at Seattle University, and in turn combatted the lure of the “slender body” perpetuated by the diet industry.

What Happens When Family Dinners End?

Disruption of mealtime routine and newfound food agency can prompt uncertainty. Emma highlighted this experience, detailing her transition into cheerleading. As cheer practice started to overlap with her family’s typical mealtimes, fixing food for herself became a new adventure: “I always had family dinner until high school when I was in sports and then I still ate what I felt like was pretty healthy. My first couple of years in high school I did not eat healthy: I would just binge on all of the junk food because I had the freedom to, I felt like, at that point” (Emma, personal communication, May, 2018). Emma added that all of her cheer exercise meant that she felt increasingly justified to eat what she wanted. However, as she started to notice a difference in athletic performance, she changed her outlook. With increased intuition, Emma said that she learned to feed her body the foods that it preferred.

Being home for dinner every night was also an important tradition for Ava’s family. Her mother, who is a nutritionist, taught her children the food pyramid and the importance of a balanced lifestyle. But when Ava left for college, she started to eat differently than she used to

with her family. Ava said that, growing up, she never had processed foods or snacks with high-fructose corn syrup in them around the house. Now she frequents the on-campus convenience store, where much of what is sold contains high-fructose corn syrup. The convenience store is in the basement of the hall where she resides, so it's easy to rely on it for snacks and late-night cravings. It's been liberating for her to eat these formerly off-limit snack foods, but it's been important for her to maintain a diet with some semblance to what she had living at home. Ava eats whatever she's craving but tries to think about balancing her diet with fruits, vegetables, grains, and protein. Ultimately, while she mentioned that access to tasty new snack foods and always-available grilled cheese is tempting, she's learning how to balance nutritional density when she's eating independently (Ava, personal communication, May, 2018).

Family mealtimes often help solidify social values and food practices. According to Elinor Ochs and Merav Shohet, who conducted research on varying cultural mealtime structures, "mealtimes can be regarded as pregnant arenas for the production of sociality, morality, and local understandings of the world" (2006, 35). They found that American families valued mealtimes for different reasons than Italian families: "at the dinner table of many U.S. families, for example, the dominant message is that children should eat their meal because it is good for their health, that is, it is nutritious. Alternatively, Italian families emphasize the pleasurable qualities of the meal they are consuming together" (2006, 46-47). Transitioning out of the routine of family dinners, which are often culturally significant, can result in different eating behaviors, depending upon how individuals think about food. Lydia described her transition to college:

"[when I came to college], I definitely heard my mom's voice in the back of my head like, 'eat your salad, eat your vegetables.' It's a little harder now because my mom always prepared meals and had a healthy vegetable or fruit to eat. Now I'm on my own to make sure I get my vegetables." (Lydia, personal communication, May, 2018)

Each of my informants cited the opportunity to establish a healthy relationship with food and diet before coming to college as a very important milestone. Cultural dinner practices and childhood food habits have significantly contributed to the mindset of each of these women.

Conclusion

When Emma was told by her doctor that she had a chronic health condition that required her to rest and stop exercising, she heeded her doctor's caution. She took a break from yoga, adjusted her diet as her doctor advised, and then returned to yoga with more energy than before. She knew that she needed to take care of her mental and physical health to have the energy for one of her favorite activities (Emma, personal communication, May, 2018). This response seems to indicate that Emma values her health over her desire to exercise, which is not the case for women across the country who exhibit disordered fitness patterns. To get to a place where she can put her health before her physical appearance, Emma endured a few significant life events. First, Emma grew to develop a healthy attitude toward her body while she lived at home. Next, Emma chose a college that advertises itself as intentionally fostering an inclusive and positive climate, and one that does not have a Greek life system. Finally, Emma found likeminded friends who supported her healthy eating, exercising, and living choices, and in the process, learned about nutrition, probiotics, and the body positivity movement. During our conversations, Emma attributed her happiness to each of these events (Emma, personal communication, May, 2018). Ava and Lydia's stories share similar features with Emma's. As Lydia said, "healthy for me has to do with my own mental wellbeing and happiness" (Lydia, personal communication, May, 2018). Many of my own peers from Phoenix, who grew up with negative body images, chose to go to schools that are unlike Seattle U. As a result, they consume different media, and struggle greatly with their confidence, their food, and their exercise habits. However, the women in Seattle that I spoke to experienced and embraced a variety of different sociocultural processes that allowed them to be comfortable with their bodies at this time in their lives.

Nevertheless, while Emma, Ava, and Lydia expressed mostly positive feelings about how their time at Seattle University has impacted their body image, they spoke most negatively of the male-dominated weightlifting space in the fitness center. It seems that even Seattle University students are not exempt from the effects of objectification. This phenomenon prompts me to wonder why the fitness center is so markedly different in its gendered atmosphere than the rest of Seattle University's campus. If objectification theory is accurate and the male gaze can be harmful to the female psyche, and removing patriarchal pressures from social spaces allows women to feel more comfortable in their bodies and prevents eating disorders, are women-only spaces necessary for women's confidence? This research leaves me with many more questions about how women form their ideas of health and beauty. In regard to upbringing, I wonder, how can the nature of family dinners predispose women to disordered or healthy eating habits? Is toxic femininity at play in sororities? Examples from my

informants' lives indicate potentially significant sociocultural factors that contribute to health and wellness in a digital era that seems to be ridden with the influence of diet-culture. How can these stories be educational for undergraduate women, undergraduate universities, and families in preventing disordered habits and low body confidence?

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Notes

¹ When the gender identity of individuals or groups of people is unknown, but they appear to be femme-presenting, I will refer to them as "femme people" or "femme persons" so as to not assume their preferred gender.

² I refer here to the term coined by Terence S. Turner in his work "The Social Skin."

³ Personal names used in this paper are pseudonyms, unless otherwise specified. All research participants provided informed consent. Seattle University Office of Sponsored Projects granted IRB approval to conduct this research.

⁴ As I am writing this, I'm reviewing an Instagram post written by a dear friend who is devastated because she got rejected by every sorority she had tried to join.